6.1.06 Allan Pinkerton - The Church Committee's History of US Intelligence (1976)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGt9vcgoL7k (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGt9vcgoL7k)

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THE EVOLUTION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE FEDERAL INTELLIGENCE FUNCTION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW
(1776-1975)

Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities United States Senate

Book 6, Supplementary Reports on Intelligence Activities

Prepared for the Select Committee by Dr. Harold C. Relyea, Analyst in American National Government, Government and General Research Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress in 1976.

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[Music] six Pinkerton among the more famous private detectives recruited by the federal government was Allan Pinkerton who served as an intelligence organizer and coordinator from April 1861 until the fall of the following year his activities in and around Washington were under the direction of the Secretary of War and Colonel Andrew Porter provost marshal responsible for the Capitals security while under martial law Pinkertons field operations were in the service of General George B McClellan during his command of the Ohio forces and the Army of the Potomac Pinkertons involvement and intelligence activity in the Union cause actually occurred before the great Emancipator arrived at the White House early in 1861 Samuel H Felton president of the Philadelphia Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad secured Pinkertons services to investigate threats of damage to the line quote by roughs and secessionists of Maryland end quote the detective dispatched undercover agents to infiltrate gangs and secret societies thought to be making the intimidations and soon learned of a plot to assassinate president-elect Lincoln in league with members of the Baltimore police force the conspirators planned to kill the chief executive when he travelled by open carriage from the northern central railroad station to the Washington Depot a half mile away informing the president-elect entourage of this scheme Pinkerton said about devising an alternative travel plan for the Lincoln Party after

finally meeting with the president-elect in Philadelphia agreement was reached that a special train would secretly carry Lincoln through Baltimore the night before the official Caravan was to arrive in that city footnote by this time Lincoln had also received word of the plot from William Seward's son who had been given

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William Seward's son who had been given the information by General Winfield Scott C James D Horan the Pinkertons the detective dynasty that made history New York crown publishers 1967 page 56 and footnote thus it looting the assassins the chief executive made his way safely to Washington for his part in these activities Pinkerton not only had an effective spy force but fixed the Telegraph to render communication of the ploy impossible detained to journalists by force of arms from immediately reporting the plan and assumed responsibility for the security of the tracks which the special train traveled next in late April Pinkerton was prevailed upon to provide a secure courier service to Washington quote several gentlemen of prominence in Chicago intimate friends of President Lincoln and men of influence and intelligence in the state desired to communicate with the president upon questions connected with the existing condition of affairs and applied to me for the purpose of having letters and dispatches conveyed directly to Washington by the hands of a trusty messenger end quote for this mission Pinkerton selected Timothy Webster who is destined to become one of the union's most successful but martyred spies when he arrived at the White House with the communique s-- Lincoln thanked him for safely conveying the messages and for his role in apprehending a Confederate spy along the way returned dispatches were prepared by the president one of which summoned Pinkerton to the Capitol a few days later Pinkerton was in Washington quote arriving at the Capitol I found a condition of affairs at once peculiar and embarrassing and the city contained a strange admixture of humanity both patriotic and dangerous here were gathered the rulers of the nation and those who were seeking its

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nation and those who were seeking its destruction the streets were filled with soldiers armed and eager for the fray officers and orderlies were seen galloping from place to place the of armed men was heard on every side and strains of martial music filled the air here too lurked the secret enemy who was conveying beyond the lines the coveted information of every movement made or contemplated men who formerly occupied places of dignity power and Trust were now regarded as objects of suspicion whose loyalty was impeached and whose actions it was necessary to watch aristocratic ladies who had previously opened the doors of their luxurious residences to those in high office and who had hospitably entertained the dignitaries of the land were now believed to be in sympathy with the attempt to overthrow the country and engaged in clandestine correspondence with southern leaders the criminal classes poured in from all quarters and almost every avenue of society was penetrated by these lawless and unscrupulous hordes an adequate idea can be formed of the transformation which had been effected within a few short weeks in this city of national government and quote observant of the conditions which might prompt the enlistment of his intelligence services Pinkerton shortly met with Lincoln and some of the members of the cabinet who informed him quote that the object in sending for me was that the authorities had for some time entertained the idea of organizing a secret service department of the government with the view of ascertaining the social political and patriotic status of the numerous suspected persons in and around the city end quote no plans on this matter had been drawn up Pinkerton was asked for his ideas which he gave and then departed with the understanding that

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departed with the understanding that further communications on the subject would be forthcoming not only did such discussions fail to materialize but it was quite apparent to Pinkerton quote that in the confusion and excitement which were necessarily incident to the novel and perplexing conditions of affairs than existing that anything approaching to a systemized organization or operation would be for a time impossible end quote

the nation needed armed forces too many competing demands for men money and the attention of federal officials for this task mitigated against plans for a secret service a few days after his meeting with Lincoln Pinkerton unsuccessfully attempted to obtain additional details regarding the intelligence plan left his address with the president's secretary and returned to Philadelphia in the meantime Major General George B McClellan an old friend of Pinkertons who had just been named commander of the Ohio Volunteers wrote asking for a secret meeting in Cincinnati Pinkerton hastened to the rendezvous informed McClellan of what had transpired in Washington and of the conditions he found there the general was also interested in establishing a secret service and wanted his friend to organize and direct it an agreement was struck quote our business was settled it arranged that I should assume full management and control of this new branch of the service and that I should at once enter upon the discharge of the multifarious duties attending so responsible a position the general then informed me he would write to General Winfield Scott for permission to organize this department under his own personal supervision and he also agreed to submit the project to Governor William Dennison of Ohio with a request to that gentleman to solicit the cooperation of the governors of Illinois Indiana Michigan and Wisconsin in

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Indiana Michigan and Wisconsin in sustaining the organization and quote Pinkerton set up offices in Cincinnati and brought a group of his detectives to the city for the intelligence mission it would appear that he utilized only his own trained agents for this enterprise quote the general informed me that he would like observations made within the rebel lines and I resolved to at once send some scouts into the disaffected region lying south of us for the purpose of obtaining information concerning the numbers equipment's movements and intentions of the enemy as well as to ascertain the general feeling of the southern people in regard to the war I fully realized the delicacy of this business and the necessity of conducting it with the greatest care caution and secrecy but good true reliable men could be detailed for such service and knowingness I made my selections accordingly end quote agents were dispatched singly and in pairs over carefully selected and differing routes among the first to depart was Timothy Webster who traveled to Louisville and Memphis with stops at Bowling Green and Clarksville Webster was also the first of Pinkertons operatives to come into contact with the Confederacy's counterintelligence Corps or safety committees to other famous Pinkerton agents were Pryce Lewis and John Sculley quote in organizing and controlling this secret service I endeavoured to conceal my own individual identity so far as my friends and the public were concerned the new field of usefulness into which I adventured was designed to be a secret one in every respect and for obvious reasons I was induced to lay aside the name of Allan Pinkerton a name so well known that it had grown to be a sort of synonym for detective I accordingly adopted the less

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detective I accordingly adopted the less suggestive one EJ Allen a nom de Gor which I retained during the entire period of my connection with the war this precautionary measure was first proposed by the general himself and in accenting to it I carried out his views as well as my own this ruse to conceal my identity was a successful one my true name was known only to general McClellan and those of my force who were in my employ before the breaking out of the rebellion and by them it was sacred Lee kept end quote when McClellan was given command of the Army of the Potomac in November 1861 Pinkerton moved on to Washington with him quote among the first things the general did after being assigned to the command of the troops around that city was to organize a Secret Service force under my management and control I was to have such strength of forces as I might require my headquarters were for the time located in Washington it was arranged that whenever the army moved I was to go for with the general so that I might always be in close communication with him my core was to be continually occupied in procuring from all possible sources information regarding the strengths positions and movements of the enemy all spies contrabands deserters refugees and prisoners of war coming into our alliance from the front were to be carefully examined by me and their statements taken in writing and quote it was also at this time that Pinkerton took on added

responsibilities for security within the capital city this aspect of intelligence operations was described by Pinkerton and a letter to general McClellan shortly after the Washington command was secured quote and operating with my detective force I shall endeavor to test all suspected persons in various ways I shall seek

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persons in various ways I shall seek access to their houses clubs and places of resort managing that among the members of my force shall be extensible representatives of every grade of society from the highest to the most menial some shall have the entree to the gilded salon of the suspected aristocratic traitors and be their honored guests while others will act in the capacity of valets or domestics of various kinds and try the efficacy of such relations with the household to gain evidence other suspected ones will be tracked by the shadow detective who will follow their every footstep and note their every action I also propose to employ a division of my force for the discovery of any secret traitorous organization which may be in existence and if any such society is discovered I will have my operatives become members of the same with a view to ascertaining the means employed and transmitting messages through the lines and also for the purpose of learning if possible the plans of the rebels all strangers arriving in the city whose associations or acts may lay them open to suspicion will be subjected to a strict surveillance end quote in addition to these security and surveillance activities Pinkertons operatives cooperated with the loyal league a group of southern blacks who quote had banded themselves together to further the cause of freedom to succor the escaping slave and to furnish information to loyal commanders of the movements of the rebels as far as they could be ascertained end quote another intelligence source cultivated by Pinkerton was the double agent as the master detective himself concluded quote in war as in a game of chess if you know the moves of your adversary in advance it is then an easy matter to shape your own plans and make your moves accordingly and of course always to your

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accordingly and of course always to your own decided advantage so in this case I concluded that if the information intended for the rebels could first be had by us after all they were welcome to all the benefit they might derive from them end quote for all of his efforts doubts persist as to the capabilities and accomplishments of Pinkerton to the extent his intelligence activities were successful did they derive from careful planning and evaluation or luck shortly after the fall of Fort Sumter Pinkerton offered the services of sixteen to eighteen of his agents to serve the Union by the time final arrangements were being made for a spy force to assist McClellan's Ohio volunteers ten agents have been put into the field at the height of his career in the Capitol it is uncertain as to the number of personnel Pinkerton had and his employ footnote Pinkerton was sufficiently secretive about the number and names of those in his employ that he apparently was in constant dispute with the Assistant Secretary of War who had to approve his bills for service see her inand Swigert page 120 and footnote for the most part he hired and utilized his own detectives quote he held the not implausible notion that a good private detective can automatically become an expert secret agent in time of war and no we're either in the performance of his duties or in subsequent records dictated by him is there to be discovered any conception of the essentially military character of the work he sought to direct end quote quote the reasons for Pinkertons deficiency and correctly evaluating the military information he received or his Blind hero worship of McClellan the investigative methods he had introduced in the field that had made his agency so remarkable in civilian life and his intense abolitionist fervor in Chicago

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intense abolitionist fervor in Chicago when he was on a case Pinkertons method was to assemble an infinite number of small details which when put together gave a clue to the mystery Pinkertons operatives traditionally sent in reports every day no matter how difficult it was to do so in Chicago these reports were filed in a systematic fashion this very system which Pinkerton introduced on the battlefields defeated him it failed because the man making the final report was an amateur at war then there was Pinkertons anti-slavery attitude for years he had been helping slaves who came to him with the most touching stories in the field

Pinkerton and his sympathy was uncritical of the excited uneducated slaves who stood before him in his tent twisting a ragged hat shuffling their feet in the excitement of knowing that at last they were incapable of giving realistic information about what was happening on a grand scale behind Confederate lines it is evident that Pinkerton believed everything they told him end quote ultimately Pinkertons in abilities as an interpreter of intelligence information for military purposes contributed to his downfall as head of the Washington spike or early in 1862 Lincoln set February 22nd for the launching of a general Union offensive McClellan who had already exhibited a tendency to hesitate and engaging the enemy did not start operations in the offensive until March when he began moving on Richmond in the Peninsula Campaign advancing over the territory between the James and New York rivers he was given an estimate of enemy strength of 200,000 men in fact the Confederate forces numbered 86,000 to McClellan's 100,000 nevertheless the effect of this inflated estimate was sufficient to make the Union commander even more hesitant to engage the enemy than he had been in the past after a

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than he had been in the past after a series of skirmishes troops under General Robert Healy and General Thomas J Stonewall Jackson launched a counter-attack on the McClellan forces in the seven days battles resulting in a retreat of the larger Union Army to the James River and a check on the advance toward Richmond two months later in September McClellan surprised Lee at Antietam but failing to use his reserves fought the rebels to a bloody draw angered at Lee's escape by McClellan's procrastination and alarmed by a daring cavalry raid by General James EB jeb stuart around the Union forces and into Pennsylvania Lincoln finally replaced McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac on November 7th 1862 thereupon Pinkerton resigned his position as head of the Secret Service quote the detective as it was to turn out did not really do much more than effect a change of front for he was active on behalf of the government as long as the states were in conflict there were innumerable damage claims being pressed in Washington the deeper into the south the Union armies penetrated the more they multiplied and these the Pinkerton agents investigated with a high average of success in controlling the schemes of Impostors and swindlers for the particular purpose of looking after cotton claims in the spring of 64 Allan Pinkerton was transferred to the Department of the Mississippi general can be commanding and now his other son Robert was deemed mature enough to join his brother in the Secret Service meanwhile the military espionage department which Allen had initiated continued to expand operating under the fairly successful direction of various officers in the east the most noteworthy being Colonel after were Brigadier General Lafayette C Baker an inventive man one of the few American

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an inventive man one of the few American spy masters in any war who seems to compare with the brilliant if thoroughly unscrupulous practitioners of Europe in the West Grenville M dodge who also attained a generals rank capably controlled a hundred spies but he was to become far more celebrated subsequently as the indomitable builder of the Union Pacific Railroad [Music] this is our hidden history

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